



MULK RAJ ANAND: A CHAMPION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He is one of the few prolific Indian writers in English who have earned a good name as major novelists. He still continues to enjoy the reputation of being a stalwart in the field of Indian writing in English. Perhaps no other writer has been as intensely and actively associated with literary creation, with arts and with the cultural mainstream of the country as Anand has. His novels and stories are read and admired all over the world. All his novels deal with the underprivileged sections of Indian society. The most recurrent theme in his novels that strikes the reader is his treatment of the oppressed and suppressed classes of society. In his novels Anand reveals the inhumanity inflicted on the oppressed section of the society which is nothing but the violation of their right to life and physical safety. In his early days he observed the large scale of exploitation of poor by rich. His novels display the impact he received in the childhood. Anand's writing display the violation of the human rights of the under privileged people during the pre-independence period. He opined that literature should be an interpretation of the truth of people's lives and he wrote what he saw or witnessed in the then society.

Human Rights are articulation of the need for justice. Mulk Raj Anand's novels contain passion for justice. Through his writings he attempts to spread awareness about human rights. He, no doubt, is writing a message for his own culture. He voices the need for restoration of Human Rights to every downtrodden, underprivileged and deprived section of society.

Keywords: *Civil liberty, human rights, literature, labor, incongruity, untouchability.*

Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. Human rights are those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being. To advocate human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected. Are the human rights an arrival to the acceptance of equality and freedom of all people or is it a departure from the beginning of a process? Human rights can be interpreted as principles of moral



propriety, a set of objectives toward achieving a better world. They advance mostly legal, sociological, psychological, philosophical and political discourses. The focus of this paper however is how human rights connect to literature, mainly to a particular form of literary text, the novel.

I examine Mulk Raj Anand's novels with a focus on their elaborations on the role and purpose. These writings raise fundamental issues about the state of the novel, which are particularly interesting when examined in the context of the postcoloniality and human rights. In this paper, I would like to point out the history and development of human rights in the world. And also tries to point out the close relation between human rights and literature.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being. Human rights attach to all persons equally by virtue of their humanity, irrespective of race, nationality, or membership of any particular social group, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, religion or language. They specify minimum condition for human dignity and tolerable life. All individuals are entitled to these rights without any discrimination on any ground, under any circumstances. Human right encompasses a wide range of rights. These include certain civil liberties and political rights, economical, social and cultural rights. All human rights are inseparable from human beings, whether civil or political. The most fundamental of these rights is the right to life. Other important rights include Right to work, Right to education and social security, Equality before law and freedom of expression, Right to development and self determination

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE WORLD

Human rights are both inspirational and practical. The principles of Human rights hold up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world and set minimum standards for how individuals and



institutions everywhere should treat people. Human rights also empower people with a framework for action when those minimum standards are not met, for people still have human rights even if the laws or those in power do not recognize or protect them.

We experience our human rights every day in our life. Although we usually take these actions for granted, people both here and in other countries do not enjoy all these liberties equally. Human rights violations also occur every day in our country when a parent abuses a child, when a family is homeless, when a school provides inadequate education, when women are paid less than men, or when one person treated differently from another i.e. untouchability .

A SHORT HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The History of Human Rights can be traced back to the earlier tradition and documents of many cultures. One can find its glimpses in the Hindu Vedas, the Bible, the Quran (Koran) which address questions of people's duties, rights, and responsibilities. In fact, all societies, whether in oral or written tradition, have had systems of propriety and justice as well as ways of tending to the health and welfare of their members. Certain humanists and thinkers of the world had propagated their views about the importance to individuals worth, wisdom and creative potential and they advocated for individual to be free and endowed with rights and liberties. The philosophers and thinkers like John Locke (1632-1704) who have expressed views on the theory social contract and expressed that the man enjoys natural rights and no government can abolish them. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the French revolution , the communist revolution in Russia the establishment of American colonies the horrors of First World War and Second World War gave momentum to the thoughts of human rights which were fully expressed in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10th Dec;1948.

Human right is an idea whose time has come. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a call to freedom and justice for people throughout the world. Every day governments that violate the rights of their citizens are challenged and called to task. Every day human beings worldwide mobilize and confront injustice and inhumanity. Like drops of water falling on a rock, they wear down the forces of oppression and move the world closer to achieving the principles expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Rights for all members of the human family were first articulated in 10th Dec. 1948 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Following the terrible experiences of the World War II, and amid the grinding poverty of much of the world's population, the human rights were drafted to capture the hopes, aspirations, and protections



which provide all people a life of human dignity. It recognizes health care, homelessness, environmental pollution, and other social and economic concerns as human rights issues.

Human rights cover economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. They are both universal (it applies to all people everywhere) and indivisible (all rights are equally important to the full realization of one's humanity. It restores social, economic, and cultural rights to their rightful place on the human rights agenda. The right to eat is as fundamental as the right not to be tortured or jailed without charges!

PRECURSORS OF 20TH CENTURY HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTS

Documents asserting individual rights, such the Magna Carta (1215), the English Bill of Rights (1689), the French Declaration on the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), and the US Constitution and Bill of Rights (1791) are the written precursors to many of today's human rights documents. Yet many of these documents, when originally translated into policy, excluded women, people of color, and members of certain social, religious, economic, and political groups. Nevertheless, oppressed people throughout the world have drawn on the principles these documents express to support revolutions that assert the right to self-determination.

MULK RAJ ANAND AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mulk Raj Anand is considered to be one of India's best writers. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and a host of essays and articles on a number of subjects. He focused his attention on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstitions, poverty, hunger and exploitation are his common themes. The present chapter deals with five of his novels namely, Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936), Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), The Sword and the Sickle (1942) and The Road (1963), which deal with poverty, hunger and exploitation as their major themes.

In his novels Anand reveals the inhumanity inflicted on the oppressed section of the society which is nothing but the violation of their right to life and physical safety. In his early days he observed the large scale of exploitation of poor by rich. His novels display the impact he received in the childhood. Anand's writing display the violation of the human rights of the under privileged people during the pre-independence period. He opined that literature should be an interpretation of the truth of people's lives and he wrote what he saw or witnessed in the then society. He throws light on the social, economical and political exploitation of poor



which is eventually the violation of the human rights of people. The following aspects related with issue of human rights can be traced from his novels.

1. UNTOUCHABILITY

Anand's very first novel which set his reputation as a realist is 'Untouchable' (1935) which is a chilling expose of day to day life of a group of people who are forcibly ostracized from society. Exploitation is the major theme of Untouchable; it deals with different types of exploitations such as social, economic, political, religious and sexual exploitation. But social exploitation is at the root of all other exploitations. The class discrimination on the basis of birth, which gives some castes undue advantage over other castes, can be called social exploitation. Anand wants to awaken the exploited, suppressed, dehumanized classes of the society. He feels that exploiting the proletariat has been our national sin which we have been committing for centuries together. They are forced to such a depth that they will sink lower and lower and cannot rise above. They have been pushed to such a lowly life that it makes them feel subhuman. He wants to uplift them from the deeps.

In Untouchable, human rights appeared to be restricted to those who control the civil society based on religious interpretations and the political regime. Hinduism prevents the Hindus from touching the sweepers or even touching anything a sweeper has touched. For example, in Untouchable we see the confectioner throws the "jalebis" to Bakha and his assistant splashes water on the nickel coins Bakha has placed on the shoe-board. Furthermore, human rights are denied and abused because of the social and religious structure in India during that time. The high castes Hindus are given the authority to degrade the lower-caste. For example, the low castes are deprived from their simplest and basic right which is water. "The out castes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of three upper castes would consider the water polluted." They are also not allowed to come near the stream for the same reasons. Additionally, they cannot afford the money to make themselves a private well. So, they have to wait all day long for some caste Hindus, who would be kind enough, to fill their pitchers with water. The working class consists of many levels, the lowest, and most discriminated, is the sweeper. The sweeper is a polluted object to the orthodox who must identify himself loudly in public streets 'sweeper's coming'. The highest degree of caste among the low-caste is washer men, then leather men, and then sweepers. In Untouchable, Gulabo thinks of herself as superior to every outcaste, "because she claimed a high place in hierarchy of the castes among low-caste" which gives her the right to fill her pitcher before Sohini, Bakha's sister. In addition, Bakha and Chota dare not to attend Gulabo's daughter's wedding due to their social status. Instead, they watch the wedding party from a distance and wait for their friend Ram Charan to bring them sweets.



In addition, human rights in this novel are in conflict because they undergo the British colonial system. Freedom is only enjoyed by colonial subjects. By contact with the British, Bakha rejects his own culture, seeing the colonizer as 'superior people', and guarding his new English cloths from 'all base taint of Indianness'. Any contact with the colonizer distorts and renders the cultural aboriginal." Bakha feels ashamed of his father and uncle for which they adopt a spitting habit that the Tommies would never do. Bakha's horrors of humiliating are never ending. It is only a bit of sympathy he craves for but he gets nothing except hatred, abuses, segregation and loneliness. Arnold feels the essential loneliness of the modern man and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner feels the loneliness of a repentant sinner .Bakha does not feel lonely as a modern man nor as a repentant sinner but as a discarded being, perhaps a bit like Lear who considers himself a discarded father . Like Hamlet, Bakha finds himself struggling all alone against a hypocritical shameless callous society. Like Hamlet, he fights with his own miseries and agonies.

Anand's project is to increase the education of human rights and to improve human rights practices. His work conducts a public awareness campaign. He offers a huge improvement in human rights throughout fiction. Many human rights themes appear in this novel. He also expresses the right to education throughout Bakha's impulse for paying a boy an anna per lesson because he always wished to learn how to read and write. The cast system would prevent him from sitting side by side with children of the high-cast. Anand concludes his project by implying that "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment..." Bakha hears a poet's remark about a proper drainage system which simply would eliminate the whole problem of untouchability . The poet, Iqbal Sarshar, suggestion is a way out for the untouchables from the practice of untouchability . The young poet, Iqbal Sarshar, believes that "we must destroy caste; we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone."

Gandhiji is presented in this novel to establish a transformation in human rights. He provides an understanding of and empathy with people with different values or ways of life. Gandhi is very keen for uplifting the untouchables. He calls them 'harijans' meaning "men of god". He regards untouchability as the greatest bolt on Hinduism, and asserts that it is "satanic" to assume anyone in Hinduism is born polluted. Gandhi also prays that he gets to reborn as an out- caste untouchable. Bakha finds relief in Gandhi's words. Gandhi speaks to the common man mind in order to improve the effort of protecting human rights. He links emancipation of untouchables with the protection of the cow , which the Brahmins worship.

Through the novel 'Untouchable' Mulk Raj Anand attempted to make use of literature for the noble cause of upliftment of untouchable. The novel displays his sympathies for the speechless and right less. He portrays about the doomed lives the downtrodden, oppresses who are deprived of their rights.



2. CHILD LABOR

Child labor is the greatest of maladies that has spread across the world. Leading reason for child labor is poverty. India is the second highest number in the world. Child laborers in India work in agriculture sector, factories, heavy industries, cottage industries. Child labor deprives a child of happy and innocent childhood. They don't get nurture and care which is essential for proper development. They remain uneducated. The deprivation of one right adversely affects the other. It means they are deprived of their human rights: Right to education, Right to life, Right to development and physical safety. Mulk Raj Anand raised this issue through his fiction writing.

Anand's second novel 'Coolie' (1936) illustrates his compassion for lost childhood through the character of Munoo. Munoo is an orphan boy who lost his parents at very early stage of his life. He lives with his uncle Dayaram. His uncle and aunt consider him burden. His aunt beat him more than he beats his cattle. His uncle decides to install Munoo as a domestic servant in the house of Baboo Natho Ram, a Sub Accountant in the bank. At the Natho Ram's house he is tortured greatly, even more than that of his aunt. To escape this misfortune, Munoo runs away. The second tragic episode of his life drama begins with his running out of Natho Ram's house. He works in a pickle factory, then as a coolie in the bazaar at Daulatpur. Circumstances compel him to leave Daulatpur and he reaches to Bombay. In Bombay, he works in Sir George White Cotton Mill. Munoo, an innocent child, is compelled by poverty and inhuman treatment to be tested by life at an early age, in fact at the age of 14. From Bombay he was taken to Simla by Mrs. Mainwaring as a personal servant and rickshaw-puller. However, change in the town brings no change in his tragic life. He receives the same treatment from Mrs. Mainwaring. There in Simla he is attacked by consumption and he succumbs to it, broken – mentally and physically. Suffering all agonies of life Munoo dies at the age of 16.

'Coolie' is a great work of art. Its central theme is the exploitation of the poor and the under privileged by cruel, inhuman forces of capitalism and industrialization. Such forces always prove a great threat to human rights of common people. Munoo is an orphan so he is forced to take whatever he can in order to survive. In search of livelihood he becomes a domestic servant, a coolie, a factory worker and a rickshaw puller. In each of these situations he is subjected to harassment, beating which is against humanity and is also the violation of his right to physical safety. Munoo is denied his fundamental right to life and happiness. He struggles for existence, Munoo's struggle is a quest for life which is most brutally denied to him. His birth rights seem to be destined terribly. He is totally deprived of his human birth rights.



The novel is a dramatization of the tragic denial of Manoo's human rights. His tragedy seems to be Anand's plea for reforms. 'Coolie' is a sincerest protest against the exploitation of powerless and voiceless by the powerful. He upholds the need for humanism and restoration of human rights for all.

3. ABUSE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

Mulk Raj Anand was conscious of the critical situation in which the Indian workers were compelled to work. His observation regarding the rights of workers and labourers seem relevant even today. Through his novels he touched this aspect of the issue of Human Rights. In fact, it was his natural temperament. A year after he arrived in London, the 1926 General Strike took place. He extended his natural sympathies to the strikers and their supporters. This temperament percolated down into his writing. In his novels he raised voice against the ill treatment the workers receive.

His novel 'Two Leaves and a Bud' relates the tribulations of working class life in India under British rule. Gangu, the central character, is worker in a British owned tea plantation. Gangu has a wild urge to live which is tragically denied. Gangu's wife Sajani, catches malaria and dies. Gangu himself is shot dead when he intervenes, while a British Assistant Manager tries to rape his daughter, Leila.

Gangu and his fellow workers work in the tea estate. However, the tea estate has no proper sanitation and water supply. Workers are ever under the threat of dreadful disease (Gangu's wife dies of malaria). The owners of the estate have no concern for the welfare of workers. They are over worked, under paid, ruthlessly exploited, starved and suffered. Working conditions are inhuman which cause fatal accidents. Workers are treated as sub human beings with no rights. Every worker is entitled with some human rights like right to work, physical safety, residential security and proper wages, and social and economical development. On the contrary, all these rights are blatantly violated. Mulk Raj Anand has described all these issues regarding the human rights of industrial workers. He had an intention of bringing changes in those conditions.

CONCLUSION

Anand shows his concern over the organized evil in the society which is the cause of the miseries of the outcaste downtrodden. This organized evil is the real enemy of the society. It deliberately denies the basic human rights to the unprivileged class. Caste system kills the human dignity by giving an unfair advantage to a certain class over the others on the basis of their birth which damages the homogeneity of the society.



The note of reforms of India's political, social and cultural institution is the major element in Mulk Raj Anand's writing. His novels disclose his sympathies and compassion for the underdog. He portrayed the lives of a sweeper, coolie, a peasant etc. who are all victims of exploitation, class hatred and inhuman cruelty which deprived them of their birth rights. He portrayed the sufferings of the socially excluded section of society in utmost realistic manner. His novels are more important in the sense that they signify an attempt to create a society in which men and women are free and equal. Moreover, Mulk Raj Anand highlighted the issue the child labor is wrong and measures should be taken to end it.

Human Rights are articulation of the need for justice. Mulk Raj Anand's novels contain passion for justice. Through his writings he attempts to spread awareness about human rights. He, no doubt, is writing a message for his own culture. He voices the need for restoration of Human Rights to every downtrodden, underprivileged and deprived section of society. His novels create a link between fiction and politics through its promotions of human rights. It appeals to its reader that salvation of mankind depends on human rights adoption and actual practices. Anand's project was the first step to human rights in universal declaration.

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